

DOCTORAL THESIS IN BRIEF

BÙI HOÀI SƠN. Management over Vietnamese traditional festivals in the Northern delta region from 1945 up to present

Major: Cultural management

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Being incepted in traditional villages and communes for ages, festivals aim not to satisfy spiritual and recreational needs of villagers, but also have an effect on consolidating, fabricating the community character of Viet people. In the course of time, traditional festivals in Vietnam have undergone ups and downs; some time they went down, but at a certain point in time they massively developed and was accompanied by external elements. This triggered not a few difficulties for cultural managers to work out efficient policies to oversight traditional festivals in line with the building of a cultural life at grassroots level. Aiming at examining festival management undertaken by the cultural sector through the adoption and execution of relevant legal documents in practice based on new management views – which focus on heritage management, helping to find out solutions to improve the public management in the field in the current period, doctoral candidate Bùi Hoài Sơn decided to work on the thesis titled *Management over traditional festivals of Viet people in the Northern delta region from 1945 up to present*. Apart from the introduction, conclusion and annexes (which include legal documents on festival

management adopted from 1945 up to now), the thesis consists of four chapters.

Chapter one - overview of festival research and theoretical issues related to the management over festivals as cultural heritages (pp. 13-36). Having contextualized the festival research, the author categorized research studies on festivals. They included the prescriptive literature on individual festivals; the studies on festivals in general; and, the studies on festival management. The author contended that the preceding studies festival studies had certain limitations. For instance, they did not see festival management from the science of cultural management perspective, failed to expose the real status of festivals on which solutions could be worked out to manage traditional festivals in the building of a cultural life at grassroots level. Hence, a study seeking for solutions to manage festivals as an intangible cultural heritage (according to the UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and National Heritage), particularly traditional festivals in the current period is of practical significance.

Analyzing and interpreting three theoretical views, among others, on festival management - status quo preservation; successive preservation; heritage management – and from the practical experience drawn from the heritage management in the past time, the

author contended that heritage management (including festival management, for instance) is not merely seeking for solutions to whether or not protect the status quo of the heritage, but another approach can be taken to heritage management. The new approach is based upon the existing cultural heritage in society. Thus, pursuant to the societal demands commensurate with the social-political situation, we can work out appropriate solutions to the utility of our heritage in response to the contemporary demands. Generally speaking, the relationship between festivals and circumstances is a reciprocal one, and the approach to different forms of heritage management in general and festival management in particular must be taken on a case-by-case basis in order to adopt a viable management form.

Chapter two – requirements for the management over Vietnamese traditional festivals in the northern delta region as provided in regulatory documents (pages 37-78). Studies undertaken by the author as stated in this chapter focused on management by the cultural sector over festivals in compliance with regulatory documents adopted in two periods – from 1945 up to the introduction of Đổi Mới policy and the followed period after the start of Đổi Mới.

Having reviewed particulars stated in some regulatory documents that have direct impacts on the cultural work in general and festival management in particular from 1945 up to the adoption of Doi Moi policy, the author observed that the documents contained from simple to more detailed regulations on all types of

festivals in general and individual festivals in particular, as well as specific phenomena related to festivals. These regulations specified the restoration, organization and limitation on the participation in festivals, especially the rejection and elimination of superstition and outdated practices; advocacy and education in the public for the respect of religious freedom. The fact shows that the management derived from these regulatory documents had caused various problems, such as festivals were held “without permission”; intangible cultural heritages associated with festivals had been steadily forgotten. Variation in awareness of managerial staff had led to a situation that festivals were organized in a massive fashion in some places, while being prohibited in others.

From the inception of Đổi Mới policy, many policy documents have been adopted, particularly including a crucial document of the Communist Party of Vietnam prescribing the building and development of an advanced Vietnamese culture deeply imbued with national identities. Hence, regulations on the organization of festivals promulgated by the cultural sector have been subjected to certain changes with respect to the purpose for a festival to be organized, the organizational arrangement, authorization application, organizational time, decoration and activities in festivals. According to the author, modifications to the regulatory documents are subject to the impact of social context on the awareness concerning the organization and management over festivals. Nevertheless, in order for regulatory

documents to have positive effects therein, it is important to see a synchronized coordination between and among governments and sectors at all levels in issuing regulatory documents as well as executing them in practice.

Chapter three – achievements and obstacles in the organization and management over traditional festivals in the past time (pages 79 – 110). While cultures of all nations across the world are under threat deriving from globalization, proper control over festivals in the past years has helped us to identify and consolidate Vietnamese cultural identities, revitalizing, preserving and bringing into play cultural traditions of the nation in response to aspirations of the people, contributing to the enriched spiritual life of the people. Furthermore, the organization and control over festivals have promoted community unity, contributing to the development of cultural life in localities where festivals are held. However, apart from positive aspects brought in by festival management, there remains numerous backlogs not yet resolved, causing new social problems (such as superstition, infringements on relics, heritages, etc.). There are indications that it is hard to bar spiritual activities from being carried out in festivals, or to control revenues collected from festivals. With such analysis, the author contended that it is necessary to undertake appropriate measures to control festivals complying with the mainstream and in a fashion that will not cause the disappearance of festivals as a heritage left over by our ancestors.

Chapter four – traditional festival management on the ground of heritage management perspective (pages 111 – 149). Considering the control over festivals as a heritage, as suggested by the author, it is imperative to draw attention to the following points: festival management is not only a cultural exercise, but also for political, economic and social purposes; to undertake proper control over festivals, it is significant to pay attention to financial and human resources, and to develop appropriate policies aimed at making full use of these resources; festival management needs to be considered a strategic preservation exercise. Additionally, it is crucial to take efficient care of festival selection standards.

Applying the above-mentioned perspective arises with many issues, including the economic-cultural relationship. There is no contradiction as durable between preservation and development as it is between economics and culture. Doing economic in organizing festivals is a fact, but it is important that the economic-cultural relationship must be harmonized, which means attention must be drawn to local communities. The issue of superstition is an example. Though superstition should not be assimilated with religious belief, it is hard to distinguish these two phenomena. Due attention should also be paid to other issues such as the just nature of traditional festivals, prevention of backward customs from being restored, organization of recreational games in festivals... when we undertake control over traditional festivals deriving from the heritage management perspective.

With a view to enhancing the management over festivals, driving the organization of festivals into a well-regulated path, meeting the spiritual needs of the people; cultivating the patriotism in the public; creating a cultural environment to preserve and bring into play artistic and cultural activities; making festivals become a momentum for socio-economic development of localities; the author suggested that it is necessary to pay attention to the following tasks:

- + undertaking educative and propagandic measures through public opinion;
- + perfectionating the regulatory framework;
- + strengthening oversight and inspection;
- + providing trainings and building capacity of managerial staff in the cultural field;
- + making financial investment

Traditional festival management in reality is undertaken in various forms and subjected to changes both in terms of space and time. The approach taken to control over festival similar to the management of an intangible heritage faces certain limitations. Thus, it is

radically important to adopt different views to address the issue of tradition festival management at the time being.

Therefore, it is recommended that in order for the management and organizational work to be undertaken in a synchronized manner, managers in the cultural field in general and over festivals in particular need to recognize the role played by the people in their management exercise. Local people are also the actors in festivals. In parallel with the management exercise undertaken by competent authorities, community-based autonomy is an efficient and effective measure. The utmost goal of the management is to let the system operate itself and self-adjust to the changes arising in the life.

The author successfully defended his thesis before the State Council of Thesis Examination on 25 March 2007 at the Institute of Culture and Information in Hanoi.

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